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Implications of Resource Availability and Use for the Economic Success of the Farming Families Settling West of Lake Nasser, Egypt

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Abstract

Egypt is a low-income, food-deficit country with limited arable land and water resources. The national development policies are directed to establish new settlements by extending the cultivated area through desert land reclamation to give farm families a basis for living. Lake Nasser area is a major target for such policies. In this study, the most important resources and factors affecting the economic success of the families are investigated. The results could provide important indications for the successful establishment of a sustainable farming community in the area.

A sample of 100 households was selected using systematic random sampling. Primary data was collected using standardised questionnaire in 2004. The families were classified according to their settling behaviour into three groups: (a) permanent families, (b) seasonal farmers and (c) occasional farmers. A comparative analysis between the groups was applied using the Farming Systems Approach to tackle differences in resource capacities and use as well as families' decision making. Correlation and multiple regression were used to analyse the most important resources and factors affecting the farmers' decision-making.

The analyses results showed that crop cultivation is the most important economic activity in the area. It is capital intensive because most crops require high levels of inputs (fertilisers, manure and pesticides). The far distance of good markets and continuous irrigation problems are important factors increasing cash requirement. Therefore, capital availability is the limiting resource affecting the success of crop cultivation. Other resources such as land, water and labour exert inconsiderable limitations. Although, the area was supposed to attract poor landless families, only farmers with proper access to capital resources are economically successful such as the seasonal farmers. The occasional farmers were the least successful because they don't only have limited capital resources but also limited experience in the cultivation in the area. The seasonal farmers have good access to credit sources particularly informal credit which makes them the most economically successful group. Low input crops were suggested to reduce cash requirement and increase the economic success of poor families.

Keywords: Egypt, farming systems, multiple regression , resource use, socio-economic analysis